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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1533  
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 004306

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2014

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SUBJECT: ABD RABBO: LIFE AND DEATH WITH SUHA -- STRANGER  
THAN FICTION

Classified By: Consul General David D. Pearce.  
Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: PLO ExCom member Yasir Abd Rabbo told DPO November 9 that Suha Arafat's undignified rant on al-Jazeera in which she accused the Palestinian leadership of conspiring against her husband had found no resonance among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Instead, her behavior had made her even more unpopular than before. He supported the decision by Abu Mazen and Abu Ala'a to go to Paris to see for themselves Arafat's condition even if it meant that they would then probably be faced with a very difficult decision. Observing that Fatah Central Committee (FCC) member (and heir to Arafat's chairmanship of the Central Committee) Faruq al-Qaddumi was showing signs of senility, Abd Rabbo dismissed Qaddumi's reported plan to engineer for himself the chairmanship of the PLO executive committee and to move the PLO back to Tunis so that he could lead from exile. Any suggestion of support for Qaddumi among FCC members, he claimed, was intended to make Abu Mazen pay a higher price for Fatah unanimity. End Summary

#### SUHA'S RANT FINDS NO RESONANCE

¶2. (C) During a November 9 meeting, Geneva Initiative sponsor and PLO executive committee member Yasir Abd Rabbo told DPO that most Palestinians were aghast at Suha Arafat's outburst on al-Jazeera satellite television the previous day and that the episode has only added to her unpopularity in the West Bank and Gaza. Suha, he said, had always been excitable but her behavior in recent days had become "crazy." Aside from the absurdity of her closing her al-Jazeera rant with cries of "Allahu Akbar!" her accusations against the Palestinian leadership were irresponsible and probably prompted by a coterie of advisors that includes her Lebanese paramour Pierre Rizk and several French lawyers. Her conspiracy accusations had found no resonance among Palestinians in the West Bank/Gaza, Abd Rabbo said; and her undignified behavior has reached a point where it is beginning to tarnish Arafat's own legacy. He fully supported the decision by Abu Mazen, Abu Ala'a, and others to go to Paris to demand a full report of Arafat's condition. Noting that they may also have to participate in making a difficult decision, Abd Rabbo said it still had to be done.

#### SUHA TAKES A STAB AT KING-MAKING

¶3. (C) Appearing to fully appreciate the outlandishness of events in Paris, Abd Rabbo said that Suha had gradually and methodically eliminated access to Arafat by all those who had gone to Paris to wait by his bedside. Arafat's closest male relative (except for his brother Fathi, also rumored to be on his deathbed) Nasir Al-Kidwa, had not seen Arafat for four or five days, Abd Rabbo said. Suha's stranglehold on information had proven to be too much for the leaders in Ramallah who are trying to ensure a smooth transition; Abd Rabbo predicted that the French would no longer "play Suha's game" and would allow Abu Mazen and Abu Ala'a access even over Suha's objections (Note: Abd Rabbo was proved right. End Note) In addition to isolating Arafat, Suha had also, rather maladroitly, attempted to intervene in the Palestinians' succession arrangements by anointing Faruq al-Qaddumi in a rather bizarre turn of events. According to

Abd Rabbo, Qaddumi had arrived in Paris only to be kept out of Arafat's room like everyone else. He became angry and left for the airport only to receive en route a call from Suha in which she reportedly told him that Arafat had spoken and said, "He says you are his caliph (successor)." This was enough to make Qaddumi turn around, return to the hospital and read out to the media a statement written by Suha which was so implausibly optimistic about Arafat's prospects for recovery that it was immediately deemed incredible.

#### QADDUMI LOOKING TO TAKE THE PLO BACK TO TUNIS

¶4. (C) If that foolishness were not enough, Abd Rabbo went on to relate Qaddumi's ambitions to eventually supplant Abu Mazen as PLO executive committee (ExCom) chairman after he assumes the role on Arafat's passing. Qaddumi's plan is to use his accessing to the Fatah Central Committee (FCC) chairmanship to load the ExCom in his favor. He would then move the PLO back to Tunis to lead from exile, leaving the Palestinian Authority (PA) to govern in the West Bank and Gaza. (Comment: Not clear if anybody has asked the Tunisians for their views. End Comment) Abd Rabbo noted in relating this plan that he has also heard that Qaddumi is showing signs of senility. Certain FCC members, however, are supporting or pretending to support Qaddumi's pretensions; among them are Sager Habash, Hani al-Hasan, and Abbas Zaki. Asked if they could seriously be supporting Qaddumi, Abd Rabbo opined that they in fact want to make Abu Mazen pay a higher price for their support and FCC unanimity in the transition period.

#### THE POISON THEORY: ARAFAT'S PENCHANT FOR SELF-MEDICATION TO BLAME?

¶5. (C) Asked how credible he found the theory of poison being the cause of Arafat's illness, Abd Rabbo indicated that it is the prevailing explanation in Palestinian leadership circles. He noted, however, that the delivery mechanism is still unexplained but he offered two theories: 1) Arafat had always considered himself to be an expert on everything, including medicine, and had taken prescription drugs virtually indiscriminately; in fact, he had a suitcase full of drugs and popped pills constantly; or 2) Arafat's symptoms seem to resemble the condition that affected PFLP terrorist Wadi' Haddad who was reportedly poisoned by the Iraqis with a glass of tea. All speculation aside, Abd Rabbo hoped that the French would ultimately provide a credible cause of Arafat's illness. He also commented that he thought the French had learned a lesson after they allowed George Habash to seek medical treatment in France. "Now," he said, "they won't let a Palestinian at the airport ask for an aspirin without immediately deporting him!"

¶6. (C) Comment: Abd Rabbo always enjoys relating the inside story and Suha's doings provided him with material of an unusually rare quality, even given the Palestinians' generally high standard of eccentric behavior. But, he was also clearly relieved that Suha seemed to be on the way to being declawed and that Abu Mazen and Abu Ala'a were finally taking charge of Arafat's medical condition. Although Abd Rabbo is among the most liberal of Palestinians, even he was shocked by Suha's behavior both in Paris and during her brief stay in Ramallah when she arrived only to take Arafat back with her to France. Noting that Suha has been on the outs with her famous mother Raymonda Tawil for two years, Abd Rabbo related that when Raymonda came to the Muqatta'a to greet Suha that day, Suha failed to stand to greet her own mother. Abd Rabbo's shock, he said, was shared by the rest of the Palestinian leadership present to witness the event. Suha, called by some a "rapacious harpy," has certainly set the seal on her deep unpopularity in the last week.